

The Quality of the Public Realm for Residents and Visitors

Report and Outline Action Plan from the OSP Working Group

1. Introduction

Oxford's Sustainable Community Strategy sets an objective "to improve the public realm of the city for the benefit of residents and visitors through working in partnership across public, private and voluntary sectors".

The public realm under consideration is not just that within the city centre but in the other retail areas or "city-villages" which service distinctive localities e.g. Cowley, Cowley Road, Headington, Summertown, Jericho and also the public realm of the city's outlying residential areas.

The Sustainable Community Strategy's objective of improving of the public realm covers

- The design of the public realm: urban design and planning of streets and public space, provision of facilities in public space (bins, seats, public toilets, information points etc), public art, transport planning and pedestrian provision;
- The management of the public realm: street cleaning, public order, licensing, retail and hospitality development, transport management, soft and hard landscaping;
- The utilisation of the public realm: shopping, markets, eating and drinking, recreation and play, cultural events, sightseeing.

1.1 Seminar

The action planning process was initiated by a seminar held at the Said Executive Education Centre on 26th March.

The seminar considered three key questions:

- What are the key issues in improving people's experience of the public realm?
- How do the various bodies and interests which affect residents and visitors' experiences of the public realm interact with one another could there be more joined up working;
- Where can the OSP add value to what is already being done by individual organisations.

The full notes from the seminar are attached as appendix one. The seminar identified six headline issues where it was felt that the OSP can add value. These were noted from the seminar as:

- Street cleaning
- Understanding colleges and helping them feel less closed
- Transform Oxford
- Cultural activities in the city villages and estates
- Space to move and find way about in the centre
- Enhancing pride and sense of place on estates

1.2 Working Group

Following the seminar a Working Group was set up chaired by the OSP Champion Sarah Maxfield with support from Sebastian Johnson. Working Group members are:

Sarah Maxfield, Chair of Working Group and CEO, Oxford Inspires
Cllr Colin Cook, Oxford City Council
Chris Cousins, Head of Sustainable Development, Oxfordshire County Council
Michael Crofton-Briggs, Head of City Development, Oxford City Council
Debbie Dance, Director, Oxford Preservation Trust
Alistair Ferrier, City Centre Manager City/County Council
Richard Jarman, Head of Government & Community Relations, University of Oxford
Sebastian Johnson, City Partnerships, Oxford City Council
Tony Joyce, Oxford Civic Society
Cllr Bob Price, Leader of Oxford City Council
Dave Waller, Economic and Spatial Planning, Oxfordshire County Council

The Working Group has met three times since the seminar and members have discussed the findings from the seminar, reviewed the six headline issues and explored ways in which the OSP can add value. The Group has identified a number of actions and next steps that are proposed for further development.

1.3 The Six Headline Issues

Following review by the working group the six headline issues were re-defined and outline briefing papers prepared and presented by working group members for issues one to five as indicated below. The briefing papers are attached as appendices two to six.

- i. A clean and welcoming street scene in all parts of the city (*Alistair Ferrier*)
- ii. Understanding and integrating the colleges and the Universities more fully into the public realm (recognising the commercial needs and focus of the colleges and University) (*Richard Jarman*)
- iii. Improving transport (links and integration) (*Sebastian Johnson*)
- iv. Cultural activities in the city centre, city villages and estates (*Sarah Maxfield*)
- v. Space to move and find way about in the centre (management of spaces) (*Michael Crofton-Briggs*)
- vi. Enhancing the sense of place and pride in the city centre, city villages and estates

The sixth issue is viewed as cross cutting with the other five issues and also with other OSP flagship issues (Economy, Housing, Health and Social Inclusion, Community Safety and Cohesion). This issue will be discussed in more detail at the OSP meeting and at the meetings of the working group to finalise the Action Plan.

Two additional briefing papers were prepared as reference papers that outlined good practice from other parts of the country. These are attached as appendices seven and eight

2. Six Headline Issues – key notes from working group sessions

2.1 Ways in which the OSP might add value

The working group discussed each issue and sought to identify ways in which the OSP can add value through:

Things the OSP can do directly	Develop a shared vision
	Learning from elsewhere
	Consulting with residents and stakeholders
	Monitoring
	Making links to the other OSP flagship issues
Where the OPS can influence constituent members and those outside of the OSP	Partnership working
	Lead on information / communication / integration
	Priority setting
	Resourcing
	Regeneration - co-ordinate / promote / steer
Where the OSP can bring people together	Stimulate and guide debate
	Stakeholder discussion

2.2 Key notes and comments on the issues discussed by the Working Group

As the discussion of the separate strands of activity progressed it became clear that conveying a coherent impression of how the public realm can be improved has to be informed by what we want to say about the city - and what we want the city to say for itself through the public realm. This is about its distinctive character; about its history; about what it values; and about how its communities live. This "story" of the city will then inform urban design (e.g. public art, road surfacing, street furniture), tourism, community development, cultural projects etc. This "story" is also vital to the idea of community identity and to a sense of place, which is at the heart of the sixth key issue.

2.2.1 A clean and welcoming street scene in all parts of the city

The outline briefing paper is attached as Appendix Two. Key notes from the working group discussion were:

- Detritus
 - Changing behaviour
 - Public information and education campaign required
 - Schools, shops/retail sector, colleges/universities
 - Local Authorities deliver services, but how do we get a wider range of people taking ownership (e.g. traders / residents)?
 - Could the OSP be a reference group to service providers (e.g. feedback group from wider range of stakeholders)

- Private trade waste is a problem
- Street Furniture
 - Street scene manual
 - as part of the on-going consultation could come through the working group for comment
 - look at examples like Chester (if not already done)
 - Explore wider participation (e.g. Oxford Inspires and Civic Society)
- Daytime Anti Social Behaviour
 - Policy for “establishing a new norm” – who are the key partners to do this?
 - Should we be more punitive to those that use the city’s streets inappropriately (traders, visitors, residents, who else?)
 - Giving / begging – what can be done to tackle this? Who should lead?
- Toilets
 - Improving and investing in Gloucester Green and others to be retained; potential disposal of some
 - Explore a community toilets scheme
 - More discussion required on further ways to improve the quality and accessibility of public toilets across the city
- General Comments
 - Oxclean is a permanent organisation and would like to be able to play an on-going role

Noted that there is a capacity to do more as the OSP than just the individual lead agencies (City, County)

2.2.2 Understanding and integrating the colleges and the Universities more fully into the public realm

The outline briefing paper is attached as Appendix Three. Key notes from the working group discussion were:

- Should also cover other student bodies e.g. Oxford and Cherwell valley College, Language schools, tutorial colleges
- Opportunity for the OSP or OMG to work with both universities and colleges to promote community engagement opportunities
 - Be proactive - produce simple folder / leaflet that gives information for residents and visitors on university parks, museums and colleges opening times, accessibility and cost (OBU provides a calendar of events and key dates which is distributed to residents)
- Opening up buildings and gardens for cultural activities
 - Schedule of events
 - Target at local populace
- Do outside agencies understand the University(ies) and colleges well enough?
 - Collegiate
 - Set up as monastic institutions
- Can there be a point of contact from the Universities for local people?
- Build on “Open Doors” (50% funded by the old University)
- Produce a simple guide to University language (terminology used), events and times
- What are the expectations of students as residents of the city – are these clearly understood and communicated by both sides?
- Opportunities to engage with / use the “knowledge assets” via the universities (e.g. academic / research on behavioural issues related to 2.2.1 above)
- Learn from elsewhere

- Visit Cambridge and research what works there
- Studentification – look at Leeds as an example

Two key issues identified as (i) behavioural, and (ii) open/accessibility of colleges for residents

2.2.3 Improving transport (links and integration)

The outline briefing paper is attached as Appendix Four. Key notes from the working group discussion were:

- Buses
 - Volume of buses in the city centre needs to be reduced and it is hoped/expected that the Quality Partnership Scheme will help achieve a reduction
- London Coaches
 - Reduce number in city centre (and therefore reduce noise, pollution and CO2)
 - Pick ups east of Magdalen Bridge or outside ring road? (aspirational)
- Broad Street and Frideswide Square
 - Very important to public realm
 - Wide public consultation – OSP to facilitate this?
- Western Gateway (Frideswide Sq, Christchurch Land etc)
 - OSP to be brought up to date with plans
 - Stay out of the technicalities
 - OSP could provide a view on priorities
- Coach Park
 - West End Partnership looking at tourism benefits
 - Coach park options being examined by Oxford CC
- Bus connectivity
 - Can you get easily from one part of the city to another?
- Car clubs are a positive and should be supported / promoted
- Local Transport Plan (LTP) 3
 - OSP must input into LTP3

West End Steering Group critical to Broad St, Frideswide Sq, Western Gateway and Coach Park - OSP members are well represented on West End Steering Group, but does it need someone who is focussed on representing the aspirations of the OSP's Sustainable Community Strategy?

2.2.4 Cultural activities in the city centre, city villages and estates

The outline briefing paper is attached as Appendix Five. Key notes from the working group discussion were:

- Public Art
 - Get artists involved in developments working with architects – integrated art
 - Street furniture as public art (using commercial sponsorship? E.g. bins)
- Use of Space
 - Integrated / holistic approach
 - “An Oxford Programme” – positive marketing opportunity
- Produce a walking guide to public art across the City

- Produce a promotional leaflet highlighting the city's offer to visitors
- Public spaces
 - Identify pitches for performance/audition buskers/street entertainers
 - Bring performing arts into public spaces
 - “Niches” for performances to be included in planning applications?

2.2.5 Space to move and find way about in the centre (management of spaces)

The outline briefing paper is attached as Appendix Six. Key notes from the working group discussion were:

- Create a “Legible Oxford” (Bristol is one example of this approach)
 - Maps / street signs
 - Integrates – history / heritage etc
- Increased joint working by City and County to deliver integrated services around the public realm
 - Park and Ride for transport – a successful example
 - Litter bins with bus stops – a challenging example
- Not just city centre, also, for example, Jericho, Summertown, East Oxford etc
- Focus on getting people to stay in the city longer
- Develop the story / stories of the City (see Bristol and Newcastle as successful examples)
 - Acknowledge and build on existing areas of strength e.g.:
 - Museum of Oxford
 - Canal Basin
 - Childrens literature
 - Promoting the brand of Oxford
- Social Realm
 - Social Inclusion e.g. Cowley Road Carnival
 - As a whole – historically the relevance of the city (e.g. prior to the University Oxford was a trades and crafts centre and a boarder town)
- Acknowledge and support the UNs desire to hold an Urban Design Conference in Oxford